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## Hospital addressing changing needs of nursing home residents

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As the demand for more in-house home care continues to rise among the aging population, Mt. Ascutney Hospital and Health Center is responding.

A reduction in nursing home beds is the first

### Windsor

step in a series of changes for the facility that will take place over the next couple of years, staff said Tuesday in a public forum that was held to ease public concerns.

"We see this huge opportunity to really create a home-like environment," said Mary Lou Campbell, the former nursing home administrator.

The room reduction came about when the hospital noticed the original intent of nursing homes was failing as the elderly and disabled opted to remain home.

"The baby boomers who are supposed to live in these homes don't want to live in these homes. The demand for home health care is increasing," said Campbell.

In the 1970s and well into the 1990s, nursing homes popped up across the country in anticipation of baby boomers. These homes, Campbell said, resembled hospitals and overshot on a demand that has changed with more technology and medical expertise.

It was a medical model that doesn't hold up to today's standards for health care, she said.

"You had residents living together in multiple bedded rooms. You can imagine how shocking that is," Campbell said pointing out that elder residents, even those nearing end of life, want more privacy.

The hospital's solution was to decrease the number of beds in the nursing home, currently at 36, to 25 and provide more space for residents to surround themselves with familiarity. The change in bed numbers began nearly six years ago in 2000 when the nursing home reduced its bed to 58, then again in 2005 to 50.

"We began to look at our needs for private rooms and we were faced with a very high and expensive building project," Campbell said, "It

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seemed like a win, win, win."

The decision will mean 15 private rooms and five double-bedded rooms.

Ten years ago the nursing home had a waiting list. Even so, Mt. Ascutney president Richard Slusky reiterated the days of having a roommate have come to an end.

"I really don't honestly believe people want to come into a nursing home and share a room with another person," he said. "We have many more alternatives than we had in the past."

Despite misunderstandings, Slusky said residents won't be displaced.

"There will be a natural turnover and we will begin to admit residents again," he said. "We're not trying to change the mix. This is not a move to enhance the financial status of the hospital."

Under a state program called Choices for Care, for health care patients who are accepted into the program, home care and other methods are made possible. This state initiative has launched another receptor for health care treatment, Campbell said.

"It has made an impact on who really needs to come into the nursing home," said Mary Desmarais, a case manager. "For a lot of people that has really opened up choice for them, for some people all they need to stay home are day care services."

Desmarais said most admitted into a nursing home fall into the upper scale on the health care needs chart.

"They are very difficult for families to take care of," she said.

More privacy for the nursing home means more of a human touch.

"The rooms will be big enough to accommodate their own things," said Cathy Leone, the director of nursing.

In line with other changes happening in the facility, the nursing home has begun to take on a resident directed care approach, relying on resident input and with that the staff hopes to institute medicine lock boxes among other innovations in each room making the medicine carts obsolete.

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